**Fast-food workers strike for higher pay**

Gary Strauss, USA TODAY 9:29 a.m. EDT August 30, 2013

Workers at McDonald's and other fast-food chains conducted strikes and walkouts in nearly 60 cities Thursday, hoping for super-size wage hikes that for many would boost their hourly pay to $15 from the current federal minimum $7.25.

The pre-Labor Day protests, which follow a series of strikes that began last November in New York City targeted fast-food chains including McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's and Yum Brands, whose chains include KFC and Taco Bell. Workers are also seeking the right to unionize.

Strike organizers, a loose confederation of local community groups and churches which has received some financial and training support from the Service Employees International Union, say restaurants in Milwaukee, Detroit and St. Louis had to close, at least temporarily, because of employee walkouts.

New York, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn joined about 300 to 400 workers and supporters Thursday in a march before the group flooded into a McDonald's near the Empire State Building. Shortly after the demonstration, however, the restaurant seemed to be operating normally.

In Detroit, home to an estimated 53,000 fast-food workers, walkouts and protests hit at least two McDonald's Thursday morning. A dozen workers didn't show up for their shift at a McDonald's on 8 Mile Road, forcing the closure of the dining room, though the drive-through was open, local protest spokeswoman Darci McConnell said. Another protest was under way at a McDonald's on West Grand Boulevard. Protests were also planned or under way in Pontiac, Flint and Lansing.

"The bottom line is we are doing this to let the corporations know we want $15 an hour, better working conditions — and we want to be treated fairly, " said the Rev. W.J. Rideout III of Detroit's All God's People Church.

About 30 workers in Raleigh, N.C., picketed outside a Little Caesars. Julio Wilson said he earned $9 an hour at the pizza restaurant, not enough to support himself and his 5-year-old daughter.

"I know I'm risking my job, but it's my right to fight for what I deserve," Wilson said. "Nine dollars an hour is not enough to make ends meet nowadays."

In other cities, including Chicago, workers disrupted lunch-hour traffic. In Washington state, where the minimum hourly wage is $9.19, some Seattle Starbucks workers unexpectedly joined in a walkout.

In Indianapolis, several employees walked off the job from a McDonald's outlet at 16th and Meridian streets.

"Most people here have a family to support, and most people here barely make enough to make ends meet,'' McDonald's employee Dwight Murray said. "We're here today because we feel like McDonald's is a $6 billion entity and it's not unfeasible for them to pay $15 an hour."

The restaurant remained open during the strike, staffed by employees who opted not to participate.

"When they work hard every day for all day long and they don't get paid enough wages to put food on the table and to support their families, then we as a community suffer," said Fran Quigley, a clinical professor at Indiana University McKinney School of Law, who was lending support to workers at the Indianapolis McDonald's.

Taxpayers subsidize workers who earn too little, he said, by paying for food stamps and other entitlement programs in which many low-wage workers participate. Profitable corporations employing such workers often make enough money to increase those workers' wages, Quigley said.

Many fast-food workers earn just $7.25, which works out to about $15,000 for full-timers. More than 25% of Americans earning less than $15 an hour receive one or more social services, such as food stamps and Medicaid, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities says.

Industry observers and representatives say a $15 hourly wage, which would boost annual salaries to about $31,200, would likely force most restaurants to pass on higher costs to customers, crimping already tepid sales and forcing employers to cut workers.

Industry tracker NPD says restaurants already face a challenging post-Recession environment. Raising wages more than 100% "is not in the realm of feasibility,' NPD analyst Bonnie Riggs says.

"Margins are already squeezed because consumers have been cutting back,'' Riggs says. "The restaurant industry has had to discount heavily just to keep people coming through the door. And there would have to be significant prices increase to absorb the cost of higher wages."

Moreover the restaurant industry says many fast-food positions are held by younger and part-time workers.

"This industry is the embodiment of the American dream for many workers," said Justin Winslow, head of government affairs with the Michigan Restaurant Association. "Eighty percent of restaurant owners started at the bottom and 90% of managers started in entry-level jobs. There's an obvious ladder to move up."

In a statement, the National Retail Federation condemned the strike efforts.

"Today's publicity stunt is just further proof that the labor movement is not only facing depleted membership rolls, they have abdicated their role in an honest and rational discussion about the American workforce."

Still, strikers were getting support from consumers.

Ryan Carter, a 29-year-old who bought a $1 cup of coffee at a New York McDonald's targeted by protesters, said he "absolutely" supports demand for higher wages.

"They work harder than the billionaires in this city," said Carter, who doesn't plan to stop patronizing the fast-food chain.

More walkouts were in the works for late afternoon and early evening.

In Wausau, Wis., Wendy's worker DuWayne Lewis planned to join fellow workers in an afternoon walkout.

With seven children, including one in college, money is tight for Lewis, who makes $7.25 an hour.

"I can't live off this, but it's all I've got," Lewis said. "I need to work. But it's hard to pay the bills and put food on the table with this kind of pay. I've got seven girls to take care of."

Rachel Wilde, who prepares food at the same restaurant as Lewis, won't participate in the strike for fear of losing her job. Wilde said she would like to protest the company's failure to provide health insurance for many of its workers.

"If you walk out on your job, that's grounds for dismissal," Wilde said. "I can't do that."

But Lewis said he hopes more fast-food workers will be inspired by strikers.

"I don't know what my coworkers will do, but I hope when they see me strike, and they see the support behind me, they'll join in."

1. Is it the responsibility of the owners to pay a “living wage” if the government doesn’t force them to? Explain why or why not.
2. What keeps the workers wages down at these restaurants?
3. If these companies (or the government) start paying their workers more (or change the minimum wage), what negative effect will that have on the economy? Why?
4. If these companies (or the government) start paying their workers more (or change the minimum wage), what positive effect will that have on the economy? Why?
5. Based on the map, what state has the highest minimum wage? Why do you think that is the case?
6. Based on the map, several states don’t have a minimum wage. Why do you think that is the case?

